LONDON ART WEEK

The Renaissance Court Casket of Newbattle Abbey by the Master of Perspective, Nuremberg, dated 1565, goes on public view for the first time since 1883



Renaissance court casket by the Master of Perspective, Nuremberg, 1565 (35 x 53 x 36 cm)

At London Art Week Summer 2019, Georg Laue, Kunstkammer Ltd and Trinity Fine Art will unveil a major Renaissance artwork: a magnificent Court Casket with trompe l'oeil marquetry and engraving made in Nuremberg in 1565 by The Master of Perspective. For centuries the Casket was in the famed collection of the marquesses of Lothian at Newbattle Abbey, and has not been seen in public since 1883. The cabinet will be exhibited at Trinity Fine Art, 15 Old Bond Street, from 25th June until 25th July 2019. Research on this Casket by Georg Laue, Kunstkammer Ltd has established it as one of the earliest examples of Kunstkammer (cabinet of curiosities) furniture. More importantly, it connects Wenzel Jamnitzer's newly-invented perspective machine and eleven important works of South German marquetry, including the present Casket, that feature polyhedra in a three-dimensional manner, firmly establishing that they were all made by the same Nuremberg artist.

THE LOTHIAN PROVENANCE

A prestigious provenance makes the Renaissance Court Casket from Newbattle Abbey, near Edinburgh, an outstanding masterpiece in British collecting history. When in 1735 the 4th Marquess of Lothian married the granddaughter of the 3rd Duke of Schomberg 1st Duke of Leinster, the casket most probably came into the possession of this important Scottish family. The 3rd Duke of Schomberg had moved to the British Isles in the late 17th century and was married to the daughter of Karl I Ludwig, Elector Palatine (whose mother was the sister of Charles I of England). The casket seems to have been passed on through the female line as a wedding gift from its first traceable owner, Karl I Ludwig, until it entered the Lothian collection.

The Casket (35 x 53 x 36 cm) sits on a fine stand, commissioned in England around 1720, most probably from James Moore, indicating that it was definitely in Britain by then and held in high esteem, almost 200 years after it had been made. The Casket was once displayed at Newbattle Abbey next to other Renaissance treasures such as *The Madonna with the Siskin* by Albrecht Dürer (now in the Painting Gallery of Berlin), and *The Coronation of the Virgin* by Filippino Lippi (today at the National Gallery, Washington DC). Henry Schomberg Kerr, 9th Marquess of Lothian (1833-1900) was instrumental in building the famous collection with a strong Renaissance focus.

The Casket was listed in inventories of the house compiled in 1901 and 1930, and King Edward VII summed up the importance of Newbattle Abbey after a visit in 1907: *"there are more literary and artistic treasures in Newbattle than probably in any other house in Scotland."*

THE MASTER OF PERSPECTIVE AND WENZEL JAMNITZER

The fact that the casket is dated was a pivotal aid to identify the Master of Perspective as a Nuremberg *kistler* (cabinet maker). Although his name is unknown, research by Dr Virginie Spenlé has identified eleven surviving pieces of furniture in public and private collections which are clearly made by the same artist, all featuring unusual *trompe-l'oeil* marquetry of stereometric solids, combined with engravings of allegorical content, and made around 1560 to 1570.

Its cultural importance has a European dimension as well, as the casket testifies to the interaction between art and science that was discussed in 16th century Italy, the Holy Roman Empire, as well as in England. Marquetry featuring polyhedra in a three-dimensional manner appears for the first time in Florence in the 15th century along with the first treatise dealing with mathematical rules for drawing them. It is not entirely a coincidence that the casket from Newbattle Abbey has long been regarded as Italian artwork and that the 9th Marquess lent it to the Italian Art Loan Exhibition in Glasgow in 1882.



Since then, art historians have stressed the importance of South German artists like Albrecht Dürer or Wenzel Jamnitzer who absorbed and adapted Italian precepts, leading to new artistic creations. The Renaissance casket is an especially significant example of this intertwining of art and science. Nuremberg, well-known for its scientific and aesthetic achievements, was the only place at the time where the preliminary sketches for such complex polyhedral figurations, like those featured in the present Casket, could be machine-generated. A newly-invented perspective machine, mentioned in Wenzel Jamnitzer's *Perspectiva corporum regularium* (published 1568) certifies this. And a 1564 drawing by Lorenz Stoer, a painter and cabinet maker who published *Geometria et perspectiva* (1567) to be 'useful to carpenters in inlaid work', has striking similarities to the figurations that unites this group of furniture. The Casket from Newbattle Abbey is on a level with artworks like Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533) that discusses mathematical achievements with pictorial means.

THE CREATION OF KUNSTKAMMER FURNITURE

Cabinets of Curiosities, often known as *Wunder-* or *Kunstkammer*, emerged during the 16th century. Dated 1565, this makes the casket one of the earliest known pieces of Kunstkammer furniture and can, in view of its cultural importance, be compared to the so-called *Wrangelschrank*, the famous Augsburg cabinet, dated 1566, that is on display at the Wesphalian State Museum in Münster. The Renaissance Court Casket from Newbattle Abbey can therefore be labelled as one of the most important pieces of South German furniture.

RESEARCH & PUBLICATION

Dr. Virginie Spenlé says: "It was fascinating to research the Casket in such detail. It stands out with its unusual iconography: the polyhedra represented as three-dimensional solids are symbols of the universe, while the engravings show allegories and scenes referring to the four human temperaments and thus also to the place of mankind in God's creation.

Made of precious materials with the most refined techniques of cabinet-making, marquetry and engraving, there is no doubt that the Renaissance Casket from Newbattle Abbey was regarded as an artwork of highest aesthetic value in the 16th century - worthy of a king, a distinguished collector who would place it at the centre of his *Kunstkammer*, his cabinet of curiosities.

A richly illustrated book dedicated to the Renaissance Casket from Newbattle Abbey retraces the history and importance of this unique artwork coming from one of the most important British private collections. Published by Georg Laue, Kunstkammer Ltd and Trinity Fine Art, this book contains essays by Dr. Virginie Spenlé and Mariell F. Mettmann dealing with the artistic context in which the Renaissance Casket was made in 16th-century Nuremberg and about its later history in connection to the Lothian collections. On June 27 & 28, visitors will have the opportunity to meet one of the book's authors, Dr. Virginie Spenlé. Dr. Spenlé will give an introduction into the exhibition at Trinity Fine Art, explain the original Casket and present the newly-published book.

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Notes to editors:

Georg Laue, Kunstkammer Ltd. is internationally known for exceptional Renaissance artworks made for Kunst- and Wunderkammer out of amber, coral, coconut, silver, rock crystal, and other precious materials. In his Munich gallery, he recreates the atmosphere of the princely Kunstkammer representing the macrocosm on the base of mankind's artistic creations and god's natural works. In building up Kunstkammer collections, Georg Laue has not just become a staunch ally of collectors. He also supports public institutions, among them leading museums, in preparing and carrying out Kunstkammer exhibitions. Since 2014, he is also based in London with his Kunstkammer Ltd. He is a regular exhibitor at TEFAF Maastricht, Frieze Masters London, and TEFAF New York Fall. www.kunstkammer.com

Trinity Fine Art was established in 1984 by John Winter, a former senior director of Sotheby's in both London and Italy. In 2016 ownership of the company passed to Carlo Orsi, one of the most respected Italian art dealers in Milan and former Chairman of the Association of Italian Antique Dealers (AAI). The gallery offers a bespoke service, handling the highest quality art works destined for the most discerning public and private collections. www.trinityfineart.com

London Art Week Summer 2019 runs from 28 June to 5 July with a preview on 27 June 2019. Around 50 participants – leading galleries and the top three auction houses - present special exhibitions, auctions and highlights throughout St. James's and Mayfair especially for the week. The focus is on Old and Modern Masters and fine works of art dating back to antiquity. www.londonartweek.co.uk